A CHILD'S POESY

Indira Menon

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To my husband – my strength

About the Author

Indira Menon had done her MA (Honours) in English Literature from the Presidency College, Chennai and later a Diploma in Creative English from IGNOU. She had been a lecturer in the Christian College at Guntur and Queen Mary's College at Chennai. She was the Secretary of the University Women's Association, Thiruvananthapuram and an active member of the Thiruvananthapuram based Poetry Chain. She was also a co-ordinator at Prathibha Poshini – a voluntary organisation committed to the development of skills in talent, personality and academic pursuits of bright but indigent children, teaching English to these children. She had been writing poems, short stories and features, contributing to magazines in India and abroad. Her hobbies included embroidering sarees and active participation in cultural performances.

Indira Menon died on 16 January 2001.

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Part One

Story Poems

King Blue Fox

A wily fox from forest lair,
Visiting a country fair,
Espied a few beautiful chicks
And decided to have his pick.

Sleuthing behind in fun,
He missed his turn,
And tripping his shoulder
On a rocky boulder,
Fell into a vat nearby,
Full with blue dye;

Looking into a mirror,
He realised with horror,
That this blue complexion
Would result in complication.

Wits taking over, he declared
Himself of royal blood.
The forest tribe in a hasty meet
Deposed the royal lion in seat
And crowned him King Blue Fox,
Seating him on a lofty box.

King Blue Fox in his new role,
Became arrogant and bold;
He kept them dancing on their feet,
Making his life rich and sweet.

Disgruntled by his demands

The animals group'd themselves in bands
To overthrow the mighty fox,
And decided upon a hoax.
Being of a kind, the foxes plann'd a coup
To dethrone the might Blue.

King Blue, holding his court,
Heard the party cry, loud and stout;
Forgetting his royal blood, he fell,
Letting out a bloodthirsty yell.

The forest tribe, shocked by the sham,
Realised the Blue's mighty scam;
Roaring with all their might,
Crushed him to blue pulp delight.

The royal lion took over
Declaring that blue, or saffron, or whatever,
It is in their right,
To be united against alien might.

The Think Tank

Searching for a drink,
A thirsty crow sat on the brink
Of an ice rink;
With a sharp squeak,
He poked the rink with his beak,
Only to find it did not leak.

Sighting a field of rye
He flew by and by
And found on the grass
A pot of brass.

Peeping in, he found
To his consternation,
The water deep down,
In hibernation.
His brain, working overtime,
Searched down the line;
And with binocular eyes
Found pebbles and nibbling mice.

Picking one by one,
He had some fun,
Dropping them into the pot,
Till he finished the lot.

The water rose
To meet his nose
Without losing sleep,
He drank full and deep;

And flew away in a whizz
To keep his tryst.

The moral of the lesson,
Dear children
Is that stones are stony,
But never phoney,
Used right,
Are bright all right!

The Dinner Date

A crafty fox and a simple crane,
Taking shelter in the rain,
Struck a friendship soon,
Deciding to meet next noon.

The fox wanted to be the first,
To invite his friend as a guest
To dinner at home, on the crest.
The crane, with his long bill,
Was dressed to kill;
And not to seem surly,
Arrived quite early.

The wily fox, with light chatter
Put at ease the latter,
By extolling the soup of fish,
That he had dish'd,
Till the crane could not withstand
The dreadful hunger pangs.

The fox, without much ado,
Served the soup for two,
In a large and fancy platter,
With a great deal of clatter.

While the crane could hardly drink,
The fox happily lapp'd from the brink
The fish soup the crane relinquish'd,
Which the crafty fox relished.

The simple crane bid adieu
Dejected and without a clue.
In course of time, the crane,
Gathering wits, friendship feign'd
To the fox's lair he made a beeline,
Inviting him to his nest, to dine.

The smart little fox, dress'd to the hilt
Appeared at the nest on the hill.
Welcoming the dapper, little fox,
The crane seated him on a lofty box.
Not to be outdone, the clever crane
Decided to play the same game;
He describ'd his culinary art
Of rabbit soup in an earthen pot.

The fox grew excited at this rarebit
And plann'd to devour quite a bit.
With great pomp and cheer,
The soup was served sheer,
In a jar, with a long neck,
Which the fox could hardly lick.

The crane happily gulped,
While his friend sulked.
Finishing the soup, the crane burp'd
For the rarebit was indeed superb.
The fox, realising his mistake,
Decided never more to fake.

No tricks in future, they swore,
Promising real friendship and dinners more.
Tricksters, dear children,
And those on the fence,

Are never bidden,
More than once.

Sour Grapes

A crafty, little fox,
On one of his trots,
Saw a bunch of grapes
On a wall; in drapes,
Round, big and juicy,
They certainly seem'd choosy.

His tongue lolling,
His neck craning,
He stood on his toes,
To have a go, at the rows.

But the farther he craned,
The further they remained;
Till a crick
In his neck,
Made him reject,
This unsavoury project.

Fox trotting he said,
'Oh! Never mind,
The grapes are sour'd
And not the right kind.

The Race

A nimble hare,
Did dare
His friend, to a race.
To save his face,
The tortoise agreed
And sealed the deed.
Starting from the post,
The tortoise with a toast,
Plodded on all fours,
While the hare, with force,
Dashed away, with a boast.
Noting the unfair trial,
The sun turn'd on the dial.
The hare, feeling the heat,
Decided to take a retreat;
Finding himself a cosy bed
Under a bushy head,
Was soon sailing in a stream
Of pleasant dreams.

The tortoise, meanwhile,
Plodding stile by stile,
Passed his clever friend,
As he turned the bend.
The sun went down,
And the hare woke with a frown;
Worrying at the lateness of the day,
Hastily dashed away.
Planning, his friend to roast,

He reached the winning post,
To find the tortoise waiting for him.

With a slow and happy grin;
Said the tortoise to his face,
'Slow and steady wins the race.'
The moral is clear;
Never leer
At those who are weak;
For there's many a leak,
Between the road and the feet.

Horse Sense

A simpleton from a village,
Along with three friends,
Set out on a pilgrimage,
Thro' a forest deep and dense;
Sitting down for a while,
On a broad stony stile,

The first boasted of his skill,
That he could, at free will,
Fashion from animal bones
A creature, all alone;
The second said, he could add
Skin and flesh, to pad,

To make the framework true
With mumbo-jumbo, too!
The third added his mite
To make it real enough to bite.
Coming upon some bones, the first two
Into an animal did glue

But before the third could attempt
The simpleton, without pre-empt
Cried, 'look, it's a lion,
Breathing life into it is fine,
But haven't you enough horse sense
To realise the consequence?'

The first replied, 'No being will devour
The one, who is his creator.'

But the simpleton begg'd time,
To climb a tree in seconds nine!
While he sat on the topmost branch
His three friends took their stance.

Without further dispute,
The third breathed life into the mute,
Making it tickle,
And sit up in a twinkle.
The breathing lion roared,
And his spirits soared;

As he made a hasty meal
Of the tasty, human veal,
Smacking his lips in glee,
To seek companionship he, did flee;
The simpleton on the tree cried,
'Oh! my friends what have you tried!'

The moral of the story
Is nothing new, or hoary,
But if you are not too dense,
Use your horse sense
To capture your booth,
When you've lost your wisdom tooth.

Crocodile Tears

A crab and a crocodile,
One wicked and the other docile,
Lived in a river
Quite close to each other.

The crocodile, one day craving jackal meat,
Begg'd the crab to procure this treat.
The crab, cribbing, walked for long,
Till meeting one, brought him along.

Hiding under leaves the mugger kept still,
Till the jackal administered a pill.
In my country, 'he said,' the dead
Wave their tails on their deathbed.
Hearing this, the foolish reptile,
Flagg'd off his tail in style.
The jackal, seeing thro' the trap,
Sensed, the leaves were only a wrap;

He sprinted down the track,
Like a mouse, chased by a cat on the rack.
The crocodile, with tears gushing down,
Begg'd the crab once more to sound
The jackal, his friend.
Back to the sand.

The crocodile hiding behind a rafter,
Waited till he stepp'd into the water,
Then with a vicious grip,
He held the jackal's paws between the lip.

Knowing the reptile to be fickle,
He decided to get out of the pickle.
He loudly swore that it was not him
That he held but only a stray stem.

To mouth his reply, the reptile opened his jaws,
To find the jackal had removed his paws.
He streaked away, like a blue dart
Leaving the agitated alligator to fart.

The crab and the river, he did decide,
In future to avoid.
Remember, dear children,
Muggers will mug,
Jugglers might jug,
But wise ones peep,
Before they leap.

The Ox that Fox'd

A farmer had an ox,
Which none could fox,
For he had the strength of ten
And was a match for men;

His ox, the farmer said one day,
Could pull a hundred wagons all the way
For a hundred pieces of silver,
That the villagers could offer.

They laughed and scorned,
And in earnest warned
That he had lost his mind,
To accept a wager of this kind.

When the carts were ready,
Tied the ox to it, tight and steady,
Sure of victory, the farmer whipp'd
His good, ole ox and quipp'd,

'Come on, you wretch,
Let your clumsy legs stretch.'
The ox sulked and balked,
Neither moved, nor walked,
Till the villagers boo'd and shoo'd
And the farmer his wager rued.

Losing his wager, the farmer left in a huff,
Pushing and pulling his ox with a puff;
He could hardly savour

The ox's bad behaviour
Wondering why
He had been foolish and naïve.

Berating his master for his harsh words,
The ox justified his deed.
The farmer apologised and promised
He would, as the ox advised,
Behave kindly and never in a huff,
Treat him badly or rough.

The farmer realised
That joking with men was one thing,
But with animals, may be penalised,
And not at all the in thing.
The ox promised to win the next wager
Which the farmer could offer,

And so, this time, he doubled
The money, which had the villagers troubled;
But they laughed and scoff'd
Thinking him a fool so bogg'd.
Yoking the ox to the first cart
Flagg'd off the wager, with a promising start,

The farmer patted his ox tenderly,
Coax'd him forward lovingly;
With great fortitude, the ox did pull,
The hundred carts to the end, full.

The villagers were astonished
And paid as promised
The two hundred pieces of silver
Without a murmur

And altho' it was in fun,
Declared the wager won.
The moral, dear children,
Is that real love
Is never bonkers,
But works wonders!

A Hard Nut to Crack

There was once a king, whose son
Lived very well and had lots of fun
With his friends in the lake,
That his father specially did make.

They loved to sail country boats,
And little rafts to float,
But when they got bored
They would've them shored.

The king, to keep his son happy,
Ordered his men to be snappy,
And fill the lake with fishes,
To fulfil his son's wishes.

Along with the fishes was a turtle,
Which, the next day did hurtle
On to the bank of the lake
Where it lay fully awake.

The prince and his friends
Ordered the uneasy attendants
To bear it to the palace,
Where the king was thrown off-balance.

Many were the suggestions to kill,
But none could fit the bill,
For the turtle's hard shell
Was no match for their skill.

'Throw it into the lake,' said an old man,
'And see the turtle land
On some, sharp rock,
Which might knock
The meat out of the shell
And all would be well.

The turtle at his wits' end,
Decided, the situation to mend;
Putting out its wise head,
With great courage said

What harm did I make?
To throw me into the lake
Nothing will be amiss
If you desist from doing this.'

The king, angry at this mess,
Decided to put an end to this fuss,
And commanded his men
To throw him into the watery den.

The turtle, with true wisdom,
Realising humans to be hollow drums,
Laughed up his sleeve,
And quickly into the water did heave.

And so dear children, when in trouble,
See that it does not double;
But use your grey cells
Before it jells.

The Wedding Present

A poor pandit of Kashmir
From a lineage of peers,
Had a fair and pretty daughter,
Who filled their house with laughter.

The pandit had a rich neighbour,
Who, tho' friendly, was a miser;
Once he wanted the pandit to lend
A considerable sum, as a friend.

The pandit became confused,
And tactfully refused,
Whereupon the neighbour took offence,
And decided to teach him a lesson.

Meanwhile, the pandit grew depressed
As his daughter's marriage was repressed;
His finances weak, did deplete,
And could not, a bridegroom's demands meet.

The neighbour, bent on harassing the pandit,
Engaged the captain of the bandits,
To rob the pandit's house of hidden treasure,
Which he said was in a large measure.

The captain entered one night, the pandit's house,
Hiding himself in the bedroom, quiet as a mouse,
Heard the pandit talk to his wife in sorrow,
Of their poverty and helplessness on the morrow

To conduct their daughter's wedding,
Without gold, or a farthing.
The pandit revealed that their daughter, in her prime,
Had no chance of a marriage, without a dime.

The poor mother cried her heart out,
To see the state of their present lot,
And berated him, for his omission
Of his daughter's wedding provision.

The thief, who had hidden there by stealth,
Realised he had been duped, as to their wealth,
And decided to play a joke
On him, who had raised his hopes.

The next morning, the pandit's wife woke
To find beside her, a pig in a poke.
She opened it, to see a heap of gold
And a note which said, 'Be bold,
And conduct your daughter's wedding,
With pomp, and pleasure notwithstanding'

The pandit and his wife were thrilled,
And did as the captain of the thieves bid,
While his friend and neighbour realised,
That by the bandit, he had been penalised.

(*A Kashmir folk tale*)

Part Two

Simple Poems

The Bird in the Palm

A wild bird
Sat on a date palm,
Picking the berries
That look'd like cherries;
He refused to share
The delicious fare
With any of his kind.

Attacking from behind
Those who did loot
The red fruit;
He picked thro' the bunches
For many lunches,
Till his little belly,
Full with red jelly,
He flew away leaving beneath
Fertilizer, in a heap.

The Pigeon on My Windowsill

Late one afternoon, as I sat
Reading, a pigeon came a tap
Tapping, on my windowsill.

His brown and grey body hopping,
Beady eyes darting, wings flapping;
Picking, pushing, seeking entry
Thro'the meshed frames like a sentry.

Neither water, nor grain,
Could my visitor gain,
So with a last, desperate appeal,
It took itself off, in search of a meal.

The Wind

I pulled a cuckoo from its nest to savour me
I kissed the sleepy leaves, trembling with glee,
I scattered fleecy clouds, like candy floss,
I lifted a wave to throw it on the rocky moss,
I tore a scarf from a pretty head, to blow it away,
I lifted a pretty skirt from a sprightly maid, at play.

I chased a kite across the sky all day,
I let a singing lark soar away,
I swirl'd magnolia flowers to form a creamy carpet beneath
I chased glinting dragonflies across the fields.

I caressed the golden sheaves, bending them to my will,
I heard a song and carried it across the hill,
I turned giant wind mills, round and round,
I picked a hat and sent it flying to the ground.

I lifted a lacy curtain to peep into the room,
I teased the busy spider working at his loom,
I love to play truant now and then,
I puff and blow and whisk for fun.

I roar and soar like an aircraft, in my wrath,
I kick and whip the dust like ice-cream froth,
I lash and dash and break limbs off the trees,
I turn cold and sharp and sting like bees.

I am at my best when cool and calm,
I am only liked when I do not harm,

A thousand things I gleefully do,
To make this world a lovely place for you.

Mitzi

A grey tabby was Mitzi my pet
With saucer eyes, she'd wink, I bet
Her bushy tail she preened and cleaned
Even before mamma had her weaned.

Cleaning face and paws, she'd curl into a ball
Of grey fur, on the table in the hall,
Basking in the sun, snapping at crows,
till her saucer eyes, dozed and closed.
Curled into softball of grey wool
She looked a baby, sweet and full.

Bread and cakes she loved to munch
But fish and chips made a favourite lunch
She would hunt mice and chase sparrows
Scampering among dried leaves in the barrow.
With miaous and wails the white tomcat
Would call on her, to hunt rats.

Across the road, in the shady haunted house
The two would sniff at holes, for mouse.
Alas! One fine summer day,
A scooterist came screeching by,
Hitting poor Mitzi on the head,
Leaving me with a heart of lead.

My heart with sorrow fills and aches
And pray in Heaven, a better life she makes.

Moon Cheese

You piece of moon cheese in the sky,
Reflecting silver light,
Night after night.

Running rivers bathe in it,
Playful leaves shimmer in it,
Flowers with fancy faces smile
Dancing peacocks fan awhile
Roof tops gleam, bit by bit
Fields lie caressed by it.

You, piece of moon cheese in the sky
You smile and tease,
Playing hide and seek,
Peeping into straw cribs,
Ruffling feathery bibs,
Muffling cheepy protests
Their eyes blink
Like stars that wink.

Oh! You piece of moon cheese in the sky,
You laugh and sail away,
Hiding behind a pile of cloudy grey,
You moon cheese in the sky
What games you play,
Till the bloody sun is on the way.

Sunday Afternoon

Silent, Sunday afternoon,
Sky blazing ecstatic blue,
Steady drone of bees,
Swabs of cotton, candy clouds,
Soft trill of mating cuckoos,
Steady slumbering breeze,
Silky rustle of mango leaves.
Sluggish eyelids flutter
Stumbling words, letters clutter
A silence; shattering beep,
Splinters noise,
Scaring peace.

The Night Intruder

It buzzed and danced over my head,
Ears plugged, I lay on my bed,
Trying in vain to sleep
As the sucker continued to beep;
Opening my eyes, I switched on the light,
To find him dancing alright;

Landing a blow, I cried in pain,
As my hand hit, not him but the rail,
The rogue hid behind my sheet,
And in the silence of my sleep
It crawl'd between my legs,
And bit deep into my thighs.

Screaming with pain,
I searched for the culprit in vain.
Finally, switching on the light,
I saw him smirk with delight,
As he buzz'd off into good night.

Sandra

Sandra, oh my pet,
Your tongue forever wet
You'd lick me clean
When happy as a bean.

You'd jump and dance,
Loll and prance,
Like a lady at a ball,
Wagging your tail so small.

You'd run and bark
For a walk, or a lark,
Chase cats up the wall,
And mice down the hall.

Oh! Sandra dear,
Tho' far, yet near,
A twinkling star at night,
Forever in my sight.

Oh! Sandra dear,
So far, yet near,
Far away in the sky
Why? Oh why?

The Wind in Udampur

One dark, sightless night
They heard in fright,
The wind in Udampur, roar,
That with might did soar.

Like an aircraft
Loud and swift.
It swept the leaves
To a frenzy of heaves,

Blowing the petals off their heads.
From dried, old stems, in their beds,
It lifted the dry dust,
To a swirl of hazy rust.

It humm'd and hawed,
Like falling rain,
But cool'd the town
Of the heat that reign'd.

It ripped and howl'd
At window panes,
Prising the hanging wires
Off their mains.

It lashed at washing on the line,
Billowing spooks in a pantomime;
Exhausted, it lay tired and spent.
But with renewed vigour and vent,
It rocked Udampur town with glee,

Like a whirlwind on a spree.

With the rising sun
The tearing wind had gone;
The morning bright and calm.
With birdsong and psalm,

Gushing forth the mountain stream
Rippled with sunny gleam.

Morning

Morning with birdsong,
In a crescendo
Of bass, alto and soprano;
The gentle breeze brush
Sleepy eyelids afresh,
The sun, his gold sprinkles
On leaf, flower and bramble.

Soft voices make way
For noisy fray;
The clatter of milk cans,
Noisy bark of dogs,
Cawing of crows,
Shrill ring of the paperboy,
Hard thumping of doorknobs.

Peace hustles,
As the day bustles.

The Garden

I strayed into the garden one day,
On a bright morning in May,
To see a lovely array of guests,
Gathered on the lawn, for breakfast.

General Hoopee, stern and grim,
Strutted about, all proper and prim.
The mynahs, in a chattering crowd,
As a group, did themselves proud.

Miss Sparrow, plain and plump
With a nervous twitter, hopp'd and jump'd.
Mr Black Crow, with sharp, beady eyes,
Looked around for a nice dish of mice.

Searching for fish, the kingfisher flew,
In his cloak of rich, royal blue.
Mr Woodpecker, the table did drill,
Looking for grub he could grill.

My Lady Swan, in white did sail,
Graceful, elegant and hale.
The Misses Ducks waddled in, with a quack,
Hungry as ever, for a quick snack.

Sir Proud Peacock came in with a honk,
Seating himself at the head, with a plonk.
Fat Mrs. Pigeon in a grey gown,
Stiff and aloof stood, with a frown.

The assorted guests did us proud
As a well-mannered crowd.
God in his wisdom had no dearth
Of lovely things, to make a heaven of earth.

Yet we men, fight and tear
Our little world, which we refuse to share.

The Little Brown Owl

I met a little brown, owl,
With fright I did howl.
It stared at me, with beady eyes,
Making me tremble like broken ice.

I was afraid it would me harm
By pecking at my bare arm;
So I rushed down the stairs
With my hands in my hair.

Blondie

Blondie is a sweet pet
Always serene and never in a het;

Her hair silky, soft and smooth,
Her skin, a lovely peaches 'n cream
Her eyes, a limped lovely black,
Many a swain, to her lost his heart.

She's often quiet and distant,
Affectionate to some, in an instant;
To her favourites she doles favours,
But none to those she dishonours.

Her hit list includes those of her kind,
Khaki clad men and twittering maids;
But a lark she is, when the sun's bright,
For then she is frisky and frolicsome light.

To A Six-Year-Old

The trees and the wood,
Make me feel good.
The flowers and stream
With happiness gleam.

Oh! For a sight of the blue sky
With curly clouds so high.
The parrots green, the woodpecker brown,
The sparrow and pigeon with soft down.

But nothing gives me such pleasure
As seeing you, my little treasure.

The Rain

Under a white umbrella
He sits croaking a la-la
For soon, the grey clouds
Will turn upside down,
To let the land drown
Into a wet gown.

The little bird,
Picking cotton fluff,
Twigs and duff,
Make haste for shelter
As the grey clouds
Sail helter-skelter.

The busy bees,
With honey packs,
Straying from home,
Feeling the cool breeze
On their backs,
Hasten to their combs.

The leaves tremble
And rustle
For the grey clouds
Will soon bring
A long, long drink.

Seeing the clouds gather
For a shower,
The farmer in the field,

Packs his plough and hoe
After washing his toe.
The children wait, not in vain,
For the refreshing rain,

And soon it bursts.
With lightning first
Pattering the panes,
Flooding the lanes,
With pools and puddles,
For children to twiddle
And float,
Their paper boats.

A CHILD'S POESY

Indira Menon

It's almost a rite, each morning, to hold the windows ajar and let the sound of bird calls and city scenes creep upon the senses. In the present company, these familiar experiences turn luminous and lasting, as they scale the depths of tradition, to retell truths that grandma once upon a time...fabled.

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